

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6490

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
Natural Resources & Parks, February 4, 2016

Title: An act relating to fire suppression methodologies.

Brief Description: Concerning fire suppression methodologies.

Sponsors: Senators Becker, Pearson, Bailey, Parlette, Dansel, Dammeier and Honeyford.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Natural Resources & Parks: 2/03/16, 2/04/16 [DP-WM].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES & PARKS

Majority Report: Do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Pearson, Chair; Dansel, Vice Chair; Jayapal, Ranking Member; Chase, Fraser, Hewitt and Warnick.

Staff: Bonnie Kim (786-7316)

Background: The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is responsible for forest fire prevention and response on both state-owned and private forest land in Washington. DNR uses a variety of methods to suppress wildfire, including the use of fire chemicals such as long-term fire retardants, foams, and gels.

A fire suppressant is a material applied directly to a fire that often depends on contained water for its effectiveness. Foam expands water, increases insulation, penetrates into the fuel layer, and remains on a fuel surface for several minutes. Gel increases the amount of water reaching fuel and may last for several hours when applied from the ground. By contrast, long-term fire retardants reduce or inhibit combustion, do not rely on the presence of water, and may remain effective for several days.

Summary of Bill: By December 31, 2016, DNR must report to the Legislature with the following information:

- a list of the types of long-term fire retardants, foams, and gels used by DNR;
- the criteria used in determining when, where, and how to apply long-term fire retardants, foams, and gels;

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- a list of each instance in which DNR has used long-term fire retardants, foams, and gels in fire suppression activities in the last three years;
- a description of public outreach and education activities DNR has conducted relating to the use of foams or gels to protect structures during wildfire incidents, if any;
- an analysis of national best practices relating to the use of long-term fire retardants, foams, and gels;
- an examination of how to update DNR's policy on the use of long-term fire retardants, foams, and gels to match best practices; and
- recommendations for legislative actions necessary to improve the protection of structures from wildfires.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: This summer we saw heavy smoke all throughout the Western states. In Reserve, N.M., we were told that although they had fires on the same scale as Washington, they didn't lose any structures because individuals knew how to use foam and gel to protect their homes. We should be educating Washington property owners to do the same.

OTHER: We appreciate the opportunity to discuss the use of fire chemicals but this is more work. There is an opportunity through the wildland fire advisory committee to address homeowner education regarding structure protection in anticipation of a fire.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Becker, prime sponsor.

OTHER: Jon Kaikkonen, Department of Natural Resources.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.